



NEWS RELEASE

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ONE YEAR LATER: THE IMPORTANCE OF EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

Anniversary of tornado and flooding brings reflection, response

ST. CHARLES COUNTY, MO – Look at the facts, and it's pretty remarkable: a huge portion of St. Charles County was hit by the May 31, 2013, EF3 tornado, and no one was seriously hurt or killed as a result. This is even more impressive when considering that there were 1,939 tornado-damaged properties, with seven homes destroyed and 40 more with major damage, as well as an estimated 46,000 tons of tree debris. In the months before and the week following the tornado, flooding and levee breaches along the Mississippi River in the northern portions of the county resulted in 319 additional properties inspected for damage, but thankfully, again, no serious injuries or deaths.

"St. Charles County's residents listened to the warnings and helped their neighbors. I believe the strong sense of community we have throughout the county helped prevent these disasters from becoming tragedies," said County Executive Steve Ehlmann.

While no one was hurt, the event required substantial cleanup efforts, some of which are still taking place. County employees, volunteers and a number of agencies around the region worked tens of thousands of hours on the tornado and flood response. The cost to County government for response to the tornado and flood, and for damage to County facilities, was over \$2 million, with damages experienced and responded to in the first 30 days reimbursed by FEMA at 85% and the remainder at 75-80%. As for the homes impacted, clean-up and recovery for most of the 1,939 tornado damaged properties involved surface damage that did not require a permit to repair. St. Charles County's Building Division issued 350 permits following the tornado, and as of May 30, 2014, 70% of the permitted work was completed.

The anniversary of the tornado and flood is a reminder that all too often in the last few years, we have witnessed how random natural disasters, health scares and everyday emergencies can strike quickly and disrupt lives. Severe weather events, fires, widespread illnesses, power outages and criminal activity are just a few of the many dangerous incidents that could severely impact our families, our businesses and our community. As we reflect upon the past year and look toward the future – we must realize that although these major events are rare, we need to prepare for whatever may come next.

Though we may not be able to determine precisely when and where the next emergency will occur, Ready in 3, a three-step preparedness plan, can help you, your family, and your business or organization lessen its impact and return to normal activity more quickly:

1. Step One is to "Create a Plan" that is understood by all members of your group. This plan should determine how you would react and where you would meet in response to two types of scenarios — evacuation and sheltering-in-place.
2. The second step, "Prepare a Kit," involves supplying you; your family, coworkers or organization members; and your pets with materials that can sustain them for up to three days if further help is not readily available. To

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view items suggested for an Emergency Kit, please visit <http://stormaware.mo.gov> or <http://health.mo.gov/emergencies/readyn3/kit.php>.

3. The last step, "Listen for Information," involves staying tuned and aware for receiving life-saving updates and helpful information from authorities, response agencies and local media.

Another way to protect yourself is to recognize the difference between a watch and a warning. A WATCH means that conditions are right for the event to occur, whereas a WARNING means that the activity is occurring at that moment in the warned area. For example, if St. Charles County were to be under a TORNADO WATCH, residents should listen for more information and review preparedness plans with family and coworkers. When a WARNING is issued, residents should take action immediately.

As we saw with last year's tornado and flood, in times of need this community steps forward to help their friends and neighbors. If you are interested in other ways you can help in the community and train for emergency preparedness, consider joining one of these groups:

- St. Charles County Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) is a volunteer-based unit formed to assist the needs of our community during a public health crisis. Medically trained and non-medical professionals can put their knowledge and skills to use in helping the community. For more information, please call (636) 949-7554.
- The St. Charles County Community Organizations Active in Disaster (COAD) program provides the platform for collaborating community response in the event of a disaster event. Non-profit, governmental, volunteer, faith-based, public service, and private business organizations are invited to join this group, which seeks to meet unmet needs and minimize duplication of services. For information, please call (636) 949-3023.
- Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) programs educate individuals about emergency preparedness and train them in basic disaster skills to assist area responses. CERT is about readiness, people helping people, rescuer safety, and doing the greatest good for the greatest number. To learn about area CERT programs, please visit <http://www.citizen corps.fema.gov>, or call (636) 949-3023.
- Faith-Based Emergency Preparedness Workshops started last year because, in times of disaster, many will look to their nearby faith organizations for support. St. Charles County's Division of Emergency Management and Department of Community Health and the Environment, along with a collection of agencies from Lincoln, St. Charles and Warren counties, develops the workshops. The next session — to be held on Friday, Sept. 12, 2014, at the Community Commons inside the Spencer Road library branch — is open to faith leaders and security/health teams from all denominations. To learn more about this free event or to register your organization, please call (636) 949-7408.

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